



Minister announces four new Psychiatric Emergency Care Units

25 July 2005

NSW Minister for Health Morris Iemma today announced a major expansion of the Psychiatric Emergency Care Service, with four new units to be constructed at hospitals in Sydney, the Central Coast and the Illawarra.

Mr Iemma said new four bed Psychiatric Emergency Care Units would be built to provide care for patients with mental illnesses presenting to hospital emergency departments at **Campbelltown, Blacktown, Wyong and Wollongong Hospitals.**

The NSW Government is investing \$64 million over the next four years in the PECS program.

“Today’s announcement represents a significant expansion of the successful PECS program and brings to nine the total number of units being established across the public health system.

Existing units are located at Liverpool and Nepean Hospitals, additional units were announced in the 2005/06 Budget at St George, Hornsby and St Vincent’s Hospitals.

In 2005/06 the NSW Government will invest \$854 million in mental health services, an increase of \$71 million or 9.1 per cent on 2004/05 and up from \$355 million in 1994/95.

“Emergency departments are seeing increasing numbers of presentations from patients with mental illnesses who tend to spend longer waiting for admission to mental health beds.

“These units will ensure that patients in crisis receive specialised mental health treatment.

The PEC unit at Nepean Hospital has recorded significant improvements in patient care.

Between November 2004 and April 2005 the average length of stay in the emergency department for patients presenting with a mental illness has fallen from 72 hours to just 17 hours.

That is an average reduction in time of more than 75 per cent in patients being referred to the right place for specialised treatment.

Each Psychiatric Emergency Care Unit will cost approximately \$1.5 million to establish and \$1.4 million per year to staff and operate.

In order to provide immediate assistance in the emergency departments where the units are to be built, recruiting will start immediately to provide a 24 hour a day, seven day a week mental health Clinical Nurse Consultant service.

The Minister has also announced the establishment of a Psychiatric Emergency Care service program for rural and regional hospitals.

The model which is currently being trialled in the North Coast Area Health Service involves the establishment of;

- A mental health triage and critical care service involving on call 24/7 access to a psychiatrist.
- 24/7 on call access to a Transit Nurse who will attend the emergency department to provide clinical care as part of the emergency department team and accompany the patient during transportation; and
- 24/7 on call access to a Health Security Assistant to assist and accompany patient's during transport.

A major achievement of the Mid-North coast trial has been the complete removal of the need for Police assistance in transporting mental health patients in crisis.

“The Critical Care Service provides a better service for patients while freeing up limited police resources in rural areas.

This model will be rolled out across the Hunter New England, North Coast, Greater Southern and Greater Western Area Health Services at a cost of \$7.4 million.

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